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President's Notes

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"It is sometimes hard to believe that our relationship with Russia has changed so quickly, in such a fundamental and dramatic way. There is still room for tremendous progress, and some is being made in a measured way each time we meet."

President's Notes

I AM A SURFACE WARFARE OFFICER PRIMARILY, but also a political-military subspecialist. The latter indicates that when I am not at sea, I am normally assigned to billets requiring some skill and experience in strategic planning, pol-mil affairs, or international relations.

Most of my naval career has been spent in thinking about and training for a war at sea against the Soviet Navy. Shipboard exercises during department head, executive officer, commanding officer, and squadron commander tours were designed and carried out to ensure that the combatants to which I was assigned were prepared to defeat Soviet nuclear submarines, supersonic aircraft, and well-armed surface ships. As a battle group commander embarked in the carrier USS *Enterprise* during PACEX-89, the largest naval exercise since World War II, I became engaged in the traditional battle of wits with Soviet long-range

Admiral Strasser holds a B.S. from the Naval Academy, two master's degrees from the Fletcher School, Tufts University and, from the same school, a Ph.D. in political science. He graduated from the command and staff course at the Naval War College in 1972. He commanded the USS *O'Callahan* (FF 1051), Destroyer Squadron 35, Cruiser-Destroyer Group Three, and Battle Group Foxtrot. His seven years in Washington included two years in the office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

reconnaissance aircraft which tried to locate the carrier while we attempted (successfully) to avoid detection.

During two tours on the Navy Staff in the Pentagon, I worked on several interesting projects which reflected our great interest in the Soviet military. Among those I recall were: (1), an attempt to discern the priority missions that the Soviet Navy would engage in at the outset of a global war against the United States; (2), could we, and if so how should we, fight the Soviets at sea in the Eastern Mediterranean; and (3), what options should the U.S. Navy put forward if we were to participate in Indian Ocean naval arms control talks with the Soviets.

Everything revolved around defeating our number one enemy—the mighty Soviet Navy. Throughout my first twenty-five years in uniform, I had never seen a Soviet combatant (only the ubiquitous intelligence collectors that hovered off our ports or followed our carriers) and had met only one Soviet officer, the attaché in Buenos Aires. I had despaired of ever visiting the Soviet Union; although I had been scheduled once as a midshipman, the training cruise was quickly cancelled following the shootdown of Gary Powers over the Soviet Union in 1959.

Against this background, all of our readers can, I hope, understand the anticipation I felt when during the months of May and June the opportunities arose to conduct two visits to Russia. My President's Notes in the Spring 1992 issue provide additional information on the reasons for these two trips.

In early May, accompanied by Captain Steve Holl, Naval War College Academic Dean, and three senior members of the faculty, I journeyed to the Kuznetsov Academy in St. Petersburg. My host was Admiral Vitality Ivanov, who had spent a week here in Newport last December. While there, we stayed at the Navy Guest House, a very comfortable *dacha* used by former Commander in Chief (CinC) of the Soviet Navy Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, during his visits to that city. Gorshkov, who served as CinC from 1956 to 1985, is truly the architect of the Russian Navy and a man who caused all of us a great deal of concern during my earlier Pentagon tours. We were very warmly received in St. Petersburg by everyone we met. Our Russian hosts simply could not do enough to make us feel at home.

The Kuznetsov Academy can best be described as a combination of our Postgraduate School, research labs, tactical training centers, and to a lesser degree, our War College. Students range from Captain Third Rank (O-4) to Captain First Rank (O-6). They are on different learning tracks depending on their specialty, e.g., command, ordnance, electronics, etc. It is rather difficult to gain entrance (nomination from fleet commander and competitive examination), and an officer will not progress in his career without attendance. The program was experimentally lengthened from two to three years, but Ivanov indicated he is attempting to reduce it again to two. The curriculum is devoid of strategy,

national security affairs, macro-economics, and management. These are covered at the General Staff Academy, which lasts two years and is also a requirement for promotion to flag and general officer rank. Many of the officers in the command and staff track, the largest course, are post-commanding officers. Much of the curriculum covers tactics and other subjects which we consider more appropriate to a pre-command rather than a post-command course.

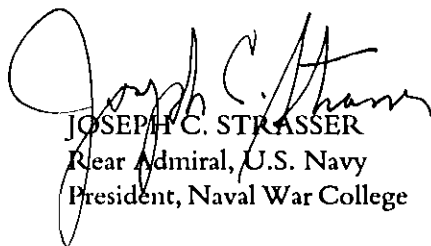
Two things really struck me at the Academy: the very favorable student-to-faculty ratio and the seniority of the instructors. The class size was generally eight to ten, and the faculty members were generally O-6s, with several being flag officers. I personally saw nine rear admirals (one-star) or vice admirals (two-star) during my stay at the Academy. Some were retired but still wore their uniforms. One class I attended involved eight students (O-4 and O-5) being instructed by a two-star on decision making. I observed a portion of an antisubmarine warfare exercise in the tactical trainer which was being monitored and directed by three flag officers.

In June I flew to Moscow, this time for my second naval strategy conference with participants from the Russian, United Kingdom, and United States navies. Each delegation had flag officer representation, with the Russian group also including Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. These unofficial, low-key discussions permit a frank exchange on many key issues without the publicity, inhibition, and protocol associated with more formal events. As during the first conference I attended, the Russians again demonstrated a great desire to improve contacts and interoperability with the U.S. and British navies. We learned a lot more about each other and continued to progress down the road, albeit at a prudent pace, of increased trust towards one another.

The British and U.S. delegations were able to visit Severomorsk, a previously closed naval base and headquarters for the powerful Russian armada known as the Northern Fleet. We toured a *Slava*-class guided missile cruiser, the *Marshal Ustinov*, and an amphibious landing ship of the *Ivan Rogov* class, the *Moskalenko*; both were in excellent condition and appeared to have been particularly prepared for our visit. Some of the other units we passed were not nearly so well maintained. It was remarkable to be allowed to take pictures and engage in frank discussions with the commanding officers about their ships and weapons, when just a year or so ago a visit to similar ships would have been out of the question.

Representatives from the three navies will meet again next April in Great Britain for more discussions and a seminar war game, probably featuring a humanitarian assistance scenario, designed to explore inter-navy cooperation.

It is sometimes hard to believe that our relationship with Russia has changed so quickly, in such a fundamental and dramatic way. There is still room for tremendous progress, and some is being made in a measured way each time we meet. As one who has been involved in both a very hostile and now a much more moderate relationship with Russia and her navy, I certainly prefer the latter.


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 President, Naval War College

